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I *Malus*

a story of the apple

Cittadellarte - Pistoletto Foundation, Biella, Italy - 19th June 2015 - 7th May 2016

I *Malus* - a story of the Apple

(...) Caretto|Spagna, on this occasion in the role of artists and curators, as it sometimes happens with the modality of their artistic practice, summarize in a rich set up the path – of study, meetings, narratives, organization, physical work – taken in these three months of residency in the Biellese territory. New works are displayed, aesthetic and critical fruits of an artistic research, deliberately left open and in the making, on an unexplored theme of which a story among many gets to be narrated, one that has never been narrated before: the one about Biella's apple producers. The issue expands, and elements which belong to both the world of art and the universe of the apple as if mirroring each other are placed next to the tension between the local and the global, logical short circuits and unimaginable similarities. Diversity, memory preservation, collecting: these correspondences turn out to be the most interesting aspect of the project. The apple represents a source of energy, expresses the possibility of life and it is a metaphor for art.

The title I *Malus* refers to the Latin word used in botany to indicate the apple tree *Malus*, a genus which includes about forty species, among which is the *Malus domestica* (or *Malus communis*), the most common and among the earliest species of fruit trees domesticated by mankind. I *Malus* (which recalls, by assonance, the «i» of the technological society populated by iPhone, iPad, iMac, etc., as established by the company "Apple") gives the name, and nominating, it confirms the existence of a subjectivity, allows the apple tree to speak, gives it the status of an organism telling its own story (one of many possible ones) from its wild origin to its exact opposite: the exasperated domestication typical of the industrial agriculture. --->



The apple tree has accompanied the whole of man's history, from the myth of Paris and Helen to the biblical episode of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, to the legendary deed of the skilful William Tell, to the well known Newton's anecdote, to quote a few instances.

The apple tree has been modified through a long work of selection, till it acquired features almost opposite to the ones of the ancestral wild apple tree, the *Malus sieversii*.

This archaic species of *Malus*, originating in the Central Asia mountains and considered the progenitor of the domestic apple tree, was characterized by a strong adaptability, a long life, resistance to illnesses and fruits comparable to the best variety on the market today. The domestic apple tree, which, as the name says, has been domesticated, has progressively become weaker and weaker, easily succumbing to parasite attacks and with less than vigorous root apparatus, because of a selection which has privileged those features more suitable to a production on industrial scale for the global market.

The exhibition is an attempt to tell the story of this evolution, as the subtitle A story of the apple says, to show the genus in its fragmentary and specific aspects rather than in its linearity, "spots" of an iconological, historical, biological, anthropological, naturalistic, procedural, expositive, material, narrative, commercial nature, and to summarize its essence through the languages, forms and practices of art. (...)

extract from the exhibition text by Cecilia Guida





Section of Golden Apple, 2015

inkjet fine art print and gold leaf on plate

Image of the cross section of an apple, solarized, which shows the five chambers of the ovary surrounded by ten dots (the marks of the stamens of the flower). This starlike conformation delimits a pentagon inscribed in a decagon; the numeric constant of the golden section occurs in both polygons, expressing a generating principle which regulates many forms in nature. This image and its hidden geometry allow the introduction of one of the key themes of the exhibition project: the shift from the particular/the Biellese territory to the general/the universal.



Memory exercise, 2015

HD video, double projection, 13' 39''

Filming and post production Yukai Ebisuno and Raffalla Mantegazza

The farmer and independent researcher Marco Maffeo, among the biggest experts on apples in Piedmont and a member of the "Let Eat Bi" network, takes on the challenge of trying to remember all the names of the hundreds of varieties of apples he knows. The work refers to the genetic, cultural and commercial memory linked to the farming of apples, and to the relationship between biodiversity and the utopia of a preservation of the variety unaltered. At the beginning Maffeo is relaxed and remembers the names without any problem, he then starts to feel the strain, to take longer and longer pauses, he struggles to remember, he resumes, and eventually gives up.

Afterwards, he realizes that he has not mentioned some of the most common varieties, even if he knows them very well. In about thirteen minutes Maffeo mentions over two hundred varieties, even if he is familiar with many more, and their names accompany the public over their visit resounding in the exhibition space. In the second video the protagonist is filmed standing still (as a watchman) in his experimental orchard, a sort of genetic bank of the ancient varieties of apples, where he farms and reproduces about 180 varieties. Through grafting, the farmer tries utopically to perpetuate the preservation of a genetic heritage into eternity, at the same time conveying the human effort to preserve the memory of places and traditions

<https://vimeo.com/170449518>



Vinegar Fermentation, 2015 > Skin of Mother, 2015

20 litres of apple juice, bacteria

The apple juice, hand pressed by the farmer Marco Matteo, transforms, through a series of fermentations, first into cider and then into vinegar, thanks to the colonies of yeasts and bacteria. The gelatinous colonies of organisms, floating on the surface of the juice, are regularly removed and let to dry assuming the aspect of delicate parchment.





Skin of Mother, 2015

20 litres of apple juice, bacteria



***Malus deck_documents and infusions*, 2015**

legno, documenti in consultazione, cornice digitale, infusi alle erbe e mela

A platform offering the public the opportunity to see the works displayed in the exhibition from a different point of view and to have an almost overhanging open view of the river Cervo, which the authors mean to visually incorporate into the exhibition space, with the intention of making the context an integral part of the

exposive project. In this area visitors can consult printed documents, books, images related to the themes the artists have dealt with throughout the *I Malus* exhibition, and sit on the wooden seats facing the fluvial landscape, enjoying official herbs and apple infusions courtesy of the Cascina Torrione in Cavaglià.





(Real) False Fruits, 2015

commercial varieties of apples (Golden, Granny Smith, Red delicious, Russet, Fujii, Morgenduft, Stark), paraffin

Seven apples belonging to as many varieties among the most common on the big distribution market are assembled to form a single abnormal organism which, during the months of the exhibition, will progressively deteriorate and transform, leaving intact only the protective shell made of paraffin and the external form.



False Fruits, 2015

beeswax, ash, chalk, iron, glass

The installation displays the wax reproduction of 105 ancient traditional Piedmontese varieties of apples, some autochthonous some imported, realized by Davide Furno, a wax modeller from Occhieppo Superiore, Biella. The artificial fruits are made from casts of real fruits, following the technique elaborated by the famous 19th century wax modeller Francesco Garnier Valletti and ->

resumed by Furno through bibliographical researches and long experimentations. The 105 “metallic” looking apples are displayed as sculptural objects at different production stages. Visitors are invited to concentrate their attention on the morphology of each variety. The fruits appear as hollow shells, skulls emptied of their contents, remains of organisms belonging to a farming society now vanished.



False Fruits, 2015
details of the installation



Rectification Trials_ James Grieve X Granny Smith, 2015
apple wood, self-agglomerating tape for grafting, 9,2 m

Two branches from two different varieties of apple trees, *James Grieve* and *Granny Smith*, have been cut into small pieces, arranged according to diametrical classes and finally recombined to form a straight line, trying as much as possible to avoid bends and ramifications. Through a violent act of grafting/crossbreeding, a complex form is simplified and “trivialised”, creating a fragile, ->

fake, obviously “deformed” object.

This object belongs to a group of works called “Rectification Trials”, through which the authors investigate the issue of the shape of things as a feature emerging from the context, an expression of a force field, and how it always carries embodied information.



Rectification Trials_*James Grieve X Granny Smith*, 2015 (detail)

apple wood, self-agglomerating tape for grafting, 9,2 m



I Malus_nursery, 2015

60 different varieties of apple trees, drip irrigation system, wooden seats

“Breaking through” one of the windows of the building, the two artists extend the exhibition space to include the external terrace, usually not accessible, creating a bridge between the protected space of the gallery and the outside. The public can enter and dwell in the garden/nursery where apple trees of different varieties (coming from Marco Maffeo’s nursery) are gathered, all for sale to the possible visitor-buyer. The opportunity to purchase the trees, together with the passing of the seasons (the exhibition will close at the end of October), make this artistic intervention consumable and modifiable, never the same throughout the duration of the exhibition.



I Malus_nursery, 2015

60 different varieties of apple trees, drip irrigation system, wooden seats



Narrow Malus Shop, 2015. For the Let Eat Bi
wood, glass, Malus domestica-based local products, various materials

A little long and narrow “shop” gathers a selection of apple-based products, fruits of the work of farmers and associations active on the territory of the province of Biella who belong to Cittadellarte’s Let Eat Bi network. The raw material Apple, in the form of juices, mostarda, dried

pieces, etc., becomes thus part of the exhibition, and from here on, offering itself to the visitors, it propagates to integrate the public into the exhibition concept and include them into the systemic network of subjects, knowledge and material, an essential element of the I Malus project. The selection of apple-based food is presented alongside a collection of objects / works realized by local artisans and artists who have created original artifacts inspired to the contents of the exhibition. All the products on display were available to buy from Cittadellarte Store.



Les Origines de la Pomme. Ou le jardin d'eden retrouvé, 2010

Documentary film, 54'

Written and directed by Catherine Peix

Co-produced by Kri-Kror Films / Seppia

The documentary takes us to the Tien Shan mountains, in Kazakhstan, where the first apple trees evolved about 165 million years ago. In this area we can still find thick forests of a particular species of ancient wild apple tree, the *Malus sieversii*, which can reach heights of over thirty meters and live over 300 years. Besides producing succulent apples of many different colours and flavours, this species has developed an exceptional resistance to illnesses, in particular to the scab, one of the most damaging pathologies to the apple trees.

But what is the secret of the resistance of the *Malus sieversii*? It possesses genes that provide the plant with resistance features and that have been lost through the long process of domestication the species suffered during its journey from Asia to Europe. This scientific and historical investigation tells the story of a Kazakhstani scholar, Aymak Djangaliev, who spent his life studying and protecting the *Malus sieversii*.